

Victim Compensation Connection

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Partnerships Make a Difference

From the Desk of Karen McGagin, Executive Officer

Effective partnerships help provide comprehensive service to crime victims. This fact has spurred the California Victim Compensation Program (VCP) to move forward with a variety of collaborative projects.

We're teaming up with the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) to distribute POST's new DVD titled, "Victims of Violence: A Guide to Help Bring Justice." It's a valuable resource for victims who are faced with navigating the sometimes stormy waters of the criminal justice system.

To support domestic violence victims, we joined domestic violence survivors, advocates, service providers and others at the Statewide Day of Awareness event at the State Capitol earlier this month. Working together is essential to ending domestic violence: We partnered with the Domestic Violence Coalition at the Capitol, and we're working with the California Crime Victim Assistance Association to develop a publication on VCP relocation benefits, shelter resources and safety strategies for domestic violence victims.

Teamwork between the Victim Compensation Program and local victim-assistance advocates is critical to serving crime victims. We thought a great way to strengthen this teamwork would be to sit down at the same table with every county Victim/Witness Assistance Center director in the state. Earlier this month the VCGCB hosted a statewide meeting of county directors and advocates to promote dialogue and collaboration with our key partners and stakeholders from throughout California.

The rollout of the VCP's new CaRES claims processing system is showcasing and strengthening our partnership with the 21 local Joint Powers (JP) Verification Unit partners. JP counties aren't the only ones to benefit from CaRES. We plan to make CaRES claim status information available to advocates statewide. Furthermore, the new Victim Compensation Program applications will help advocates connect victims with the program and make claims processing more efficient.

You can find out more about our collaborative initiatives inside this newsletter. We look forward to working with the victim services community on these and many other partnerships. After all, providing victim services in California is a team effort.



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Victims Since 1965*

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Victims, Supporters Stand United Against Domestic Violence

Event Marks October's Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Domestic violence survivors, advocates, service providers, judicial and legislative officials gathered at the west steps of the State Capitol on October 2 to observe the second-annual Californians Uniting to End Domestic Violence Statewide Day of Awareness.



Actress Robin Givens, the featured speaker and herself a victim of past domestic violence, assured victims that they are not to blame for their abuse.

"It is not your fault," said Givens. "It is not okay. You do not deserve this."

Fortunately, victims such as Givens are not alone. They are supported by a network of local and state organizations.

As part of that safety net, the California Victim Compensation Program (VCP) provides essential assistance. Last fiscal year, 27 percent of all claims received by the VCP were domestic violence claims.

VCP benefits pay for medical treatment, dental treatment, mental health counseling, relocation costs and other expenses incurred by domestic violence victims but not paid through some other form of reimbursement, such as insurance.

Set to coincide with October's Domestic Violence Awareness Month, the observance at the Capitol sought to increase public awareness and highlight the seriousness of domestic violence.

Speaker Givens, who was married to boxer Mike Tyson in the 1980s, said Tyson brutalized her throughout their marriage. Her story of domestic violence



Actress Robin Givens speaks at the Domestic Violence Awareness Month Day of Awareness event at the State Capitol.

mirrors that of others. Like many other victims, there is a history of abuse in her family; her mother and grandmother were also victims of domestic violence.

"There must be a shift in thinking, she said: "Our society cannot permit this."

According to statistics from the California Department of Justice, 153 murders occurred in 2005 as the result of intimate partner violence. The department also reports that California law enforcement received 176,299 domestic violence-related calls last year. Of those calls, 80,946 involved weapons.

For more information, visit the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence website at www.cpedv.org.

Teamwork Tops Agenda at Statewide Meeting of County Victim/Witness Directors

The VCGCB hosted its first statewide meeting with all county Victim/Witness Assistance Center directors at the Board's headquarters in Sacramento.

"The Victim Compensation Program serves every California county, and the Victim/Witness Assistance community is one of our key partners," said VCGCB Executive Officer Karen McGagin of the October 2 conference. "We wanted to provide this opportunity for dialogue, education and collaboration."

In her address to the county directors, McGagin highlighted the importance of partnership between the Victim Compensation Program (VCP) and local Victim/Witness programs.

One such joint effort involves the Victim Compensation Committee of the California Crime Victim Assistance Association. The VCP is working with the committee on a publication that will provide domestic violence victims with information on relocation benefits, shelter and housing resources, safety tips and security strategies.

The VCP also provided a detailed briefing and question-and-answer session on CaRES, the new automated claims processing system.



VCGCB Executive Officer Karen McGagin welcomes county Victim/Witness Program directors to the statewide meeting.

There was consensus that the meeting was a great idea and that such meetings should be held at least annually.

The county directors would later be meeting as the California Crime Victim Assistance Association (CCVAA), which provides a statewide forum for the coordination of crime victims' rights and services, and serves as a unified voice for California Victim/Witness Program Coordinators.

Every two months, the association's Victim Compensation Committee meets with the Victim Compensation Program to provide input on the program. The meetings are open to anyone interested in victims' issues.

CCVAA membership includes Victim/Witness coordinators from every California county. It includes staff from Victim/Witness programs that serve as Joint Powers Verification Units and staff from non-JP counties.

Statewide Rollout Rolls On

Program Plans CaRES Access for Victim/Witness Advocates

The Victim Compensation Program's new state-of-the-art, web-based claims processing system is in the final phase of a rollout to all 21 Joint Powers (JP) Verification Units in California. The benefits of CaRES will soon be statewide.

While staff at the local JPs will use CaRES to process victim compensation claims, plans call for Victim/Witness Advocates in all California counties to have access to the system for information on claims for their local crime victims.

Advocates statewide will also have access to the new on-line "LiveCycle" victim compensation application, which is currently being piloted by San Bernardino County. The new form is completed online and with the push of a button places applicant data in barcodes that are scanned to bring the data directly into CaRES.

In early October, Shasta, Santa Cruz, San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties became the newest local CaRES users. In September, Orange County and Riverside County went live. Still to come are the counties of Alameda, Butte, El Dorado, Humboldt, Placer, San Diego, San Francisco, Sonoma and Tulare.

The schedule calls for all JPs to be processing claims with CaRES by the end of November.

"Not only is CaRES going live in more locations every week or two during this final phase of the statewide

rollout, but the system is steadily being improved as we go," said Laura Hill, Deputy Executive Officer for the Victim Compensation Program.

Developers continue to upgrade CaRES software to improve the system's responsiveness and to add new

features. Some of the latest improvements include claim summary screens, automation for claim approval agendas, and an interface with the State Controller for claimant and provider payments.

"This is an ambitious development schedule," said CaRES Project Manager Darren Macdonald. "You never get all of a system's features up front. First you build a solid foundation, and then you add features in a systematic way, taking into account needs, priorities and how changes will affect the system."

In addition to access to claim summary information for victim advocates statewide, planned features include:

- Criminal Disposition Tracking for local restitution staff;
- improved ability to handle adjustments to payments;
- enhanced correspondence functionality;
- integration of Mental Health Treatment Plans and Additional Treatment Plans; and
- expanded appeals functionality.



Foundation for the Future

Some of the key benefits of CaRES:

- **Speeds up payments to providers and crime victims**
- **Streamlines business process for handling claims**
- **Enhances customer service with instant access to claim information**
- **Reduces errors by scanning data from new applications**
- **Paperless, replaces bulky files**
- **Facilitates sharing of workload**

Going Live!



County partners are going live with CaRES in the final phase of the statewide rollout. At top, from left, Michael Mizukami and Sandra Duarte from Orange County receive assistance from Dionne Bell-Rucker of the Victim Compensation Program. At left, Mizukami marks the occasion with a CaRES sign.



Above right, from front, Riverside County staff members Berenice Tobias, Loretta Smith and Janet West receive CaRES training at VCP headquarters the week prior to going live. At left, county staff member Danielle Espinoza receives pointers from CaRES expert Salvador Murillo as the system goes live in Riverside. Below, happy to be up and running on CaRES in Riverside County are, from left, Valerie Thompson, Deanna DiNicola, West, Tobias, Smith, Espinoza, Laura Rodriguez, Enrique Maciel, Tahirah Sutton, Wendy Gonzalez and Yvette Alexander.



County Partners Connect With System



Committee Receives Information on Helping Victims in Missing Person Cases

Lessons from an expert on responding to missing-person cases highlighted the latest quarterly meeting of the Victim Compensation Program Advisory Committee.

The committee is made up of the VCGCB executive officer, judicial officials, victim advocates, and members of state agencies. The purpose of the committee is to increase opportunities for communication and collaboration among victim advocates and service providers.

A presentation by Kim Petersen, executive director of the Carole Sund/Carrington Memorial Reward Foundation, was featured at the committee's meeting on Sept. 26. Petersen shared her extensive experience on how to respond in a missing person case.

The foundation was started by Francis and Carole Carrington in 1999 after the disappearance and subsequent death of their daughter Carole Sund, granddaughter Julie Sund and family friend Silvina Pelosso.

Though the Carrington family suffered a tremendous loss, they have used their experience to assist others.

"They wanted to help other families and they really have," said Petersen.

The foundation's goal is to "safely return missing persons to their homes and to secure the arrest and conviction of violent criminals." The foundation works to raise public awareness about both missing persons who disappeared under suspicious circumstances as well as victims of murder. A fund was established by the foundation to fund missing person rewards for families who lack adequate financial resources.

Since its establishment in 1999, the foundation has assisted in the safe recovery of nine missing persons. Supported entirely by private donations,



Kim Petersen stands before a backdrop of Julie Sund, Carole Sund, and Silvina Peloso.

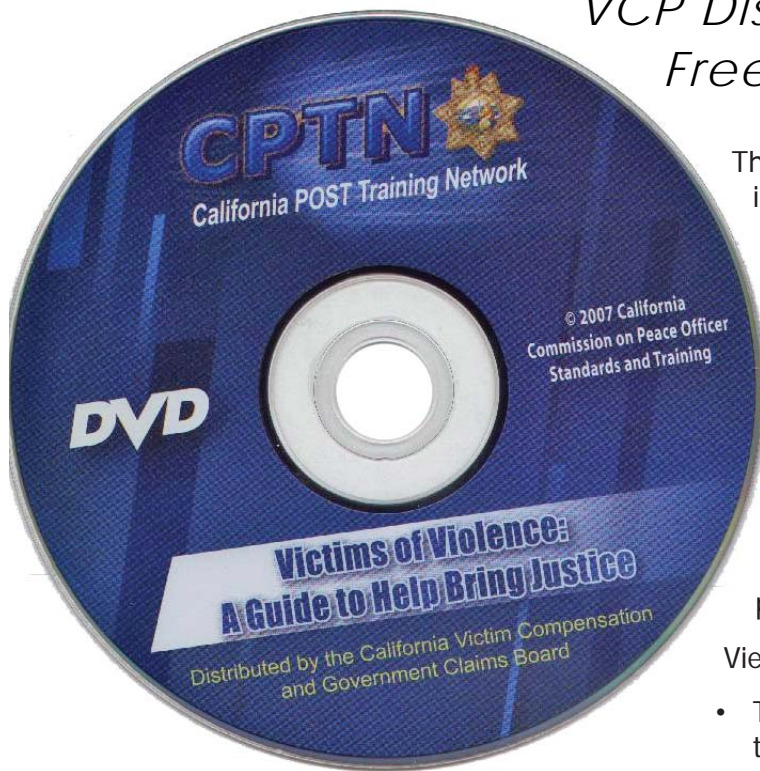
the foundation has funded \$3 million in rewards going to both the recovery of missing persons as well as the arrest and conviction of criminals involved in missing person cases.

The foundation has assisted in 450 cases in 45 states, contributing to the arrest and conviction of 41 violent criminals, 37 of whom were involved in murders.

For more information on the Carole Sund/Carrington Memorial Reward Foundation, go to www.carolesundfoundation.com.

Educational Video Prepares Victims for Challenges on Road to Justice

VCP Distributing DVD Free of Charge



The Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board and the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) are teaming up to make POST's new two-hour DVD, "Victims of Violence: A Guide to Help Bring Justice," available for crime victims.

"There may be no school where victims can go to learn how to navigate the criminal justice system," said Karen McGagin, VCGCB Executive Officer. "But this DVD is the next best thing."

The video, which will be distributed to Victim/Witness Assistance Centers, law enforcement agencies, victim support groups, and any interested parties free of charge, is designed to teach victims how to work more effectively with law enforcement. It also educates law enforcement on how victims can become involved in their case.

The DVD shows the court process from start to finish through the eyes of victims and their families, victim advocates, Superior Court judges, investigators, district attorneys, prosecutors, victim-witness personnel and public defenders.

It emphasizes the crucial role victims play in bringing a case to a successful prosecution by working closely with law enforcement. Various speakers define the parts of the long process that involves arrests, arraignments, indictments, plea bargains, hearings, motions, delays, trials, testimony, convictions, sentencing, possible parole and parole hearings.

Viewing the DVD will also help victims understand:

- The importance of good note-taking and the need to be accurate and consistent throughout the case;
- How the investigator pieces the case together and turns it over to the prosecutor;
- The painful reality that family members are considered suspects and will be investigated;
- Additional problems and emotional pain may be caused by the accused/defense, the media and public interest in the case;
- Victims have the right to not speak with defense attorneys; and
- Victims have the right to present a victim impact statement.

If you would like to request additional copies of the DVD, please complete a materials request form at www.victimcompensation.ca.gov. For orders of 50 or more, please e-mail Miles Bristow, Public Information Officer, at miles.bristow@vcgcb.ca.gov.

Program Statistics Show Increased Payments

Trends are positive for the Victim Compensation Program (VCP).

During the 2006-07 fiscal year, the VCP paid nearly \$75 million in victim benefits, a more than 13 percent increase over the previous fiscal year. It approved 44,459 applications, up over 2 percent.

"We believe the upward trend in payments and applications is due in part to steps taken by the three-member board in 2006 to enhance benefits to victims and increase access to care," said Karen McGagin, Executive Officer of the Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board.

Of the \$75 million in victim benefits paid, medical and dental costs made up the largest category of expenses at 37 percent. Mental health expenses also accounted for a significant portion of benefits at 23 percent. The remaining compensation paid went to lost wages and support, funeral/burial expenses, and other expenses at 18 percent, 17 percent, and 5 percent, respectively.

The successful partnership between the VCP and Victim Witness Assistance Centers throughout the state continued. Claims filed through Victim Witness Assistance Centers accounted for 80 percent of all applications filed with the VCP.

"Every county Victim/Witness Assistance Program contributes to the success of the Victim Compensation Program," said McGagin. "They help connect crime victims with available benefits."

During fiscal year 2006-07, the VCP worked with local county partners, including Criminal Restitution Compact staff, to request court-imposed restitution from criminal offenders. Along with our partners at the Franchise Tax Board and Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, more than \$66 million in restitution fines and fees were collected from offenders, an increase of \$6 million compared to the prior year. The restitution collections are used to fund compensation for crime victims.

For more VCP statistics from the 2006-07 fiscal year, visit www.vcgcb.ca.gov.

National Day of Remembrance for Murder Victims

The three-member Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board acknowledged the first formal observance of the National Day of Remembrance for Murder Victims with a moment of silence during the board's monthly meeting on September 25.

Founded in 1978 by Robert and Charlotte Hullinger after their 19-year-old daughter Lisa was murdered, the Day of Remembrance began nearly 30 years ago as a memorial to Lisa. The Day of Remembrance is observed on the anniversary of Lisa's death in honor of all victims of homicide and their survivors.

Although the violent crime rate in California is down significantly since a peak in the early 90s and has also decreased in the past five years, there were still 2,483 homicide victims in California in 2006.

"The National Day of Remembrance for Murder Victims underscores the importance of providing services to victims and their families," said Karen McGagin, Executive Officer of the VCGCB. "The Victim Compensation Program helps survivors of homicide and other victims recover from the physical, emotional and financial trauma of violent crime."

The Victim Compensation Program assists survivors of homicide in their recovery from the financial impact of the crime. Family members can receive assistance to pay for funerals. Compensation payments offset the loss of financial support from the victim. The program also covers mental health services that help survivors cope with their loss.